



Support for veterans and their families has always been a national concern and priority. In 1626, the Plymouth Colony passed a law that provided lifetime support for any soldier who returned from battle with an injury. In 1789, the Continental Congress passed a national pension law for soldiers who fought in the American Revolution. President Lincoln signed legislation in 1862 which authorized national cemeteries. In 1865, the National Home for Volunteer Soldiers was established, and homes for disabled Civil War veterans were opened in several locations throughout the country.

In 1919, the United States Government Life Insurance program was established. In 1930, a major consolidation of veterans service functions occurred when President Hoover signed a bill which established the Veterans Administration, an independent Federal agency that incorporated the Veterans Bureau, Bureau of Pensions, and National Home for Volunteer Soldiers.

During World War II, the Nation's most far-reaching program for veterans was established with the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as "The GI Bill of Rights," which offered low interest loans to purchase homes, farms, or small businesses; unemployment benefits; financial assistance for education; and health care and rehabilitation services. Ultimately, in 1988, recognizing the need to coordinate the full range of services for our Nation's veterans, Congress established a new cabinet post creating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

VA will continue to transform. Today, there are more than 25 million men and women who have served in the armed forces. VA currently provides health care and benefit services to millions of veterans as well as eligible survivors and dependents of veterans. The needs of today's veterans and their families will continue to change. While the future veteran population will most likely be smaller, veterans will live longer and may require additional health care and benefit services. As a Department, our vision for the future is:

"As the Department of Veterans Affairs heads into the 21st Century, we will strive to meet the needs of the Nation's veterans and their families today and tomorrow. We will become an even more veteran-focused organization, functioning as a single comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served our Nation. We will continuously benchmark the quality and delivery of our service with the best in business and use innovative means and high technology to deliver world-class service. We will foster partnerships with veterans and other stakeholders, making them part of the decision-making process. We will cultivate a dedicated VA work force of highly skilled employees who understand, believe in, and take pride in our vitally important mission."

This document, our first formal VA Strategic Plan for Employees, communicates VA's mission, vision, core values, long-term goals and objectives, and our shared commitment to serving veterans and their families. For more detailed information regarding VA's long-term strategic direction, FY 2000 accomplishments and planned achievements for FY 2002, I encourage you to refer to VA's compendium of planning documents, including the Strategic Plan for FY 2001 - 2006, FY 2000 Annual Performance Report, and FY 2002 Annual Performance Plan.

I am sincerely honored and humbled to have been confirmed as the Secretary for Veterans Affairs. I believe deeply in our Department and am fully committed to our mission of service to veterans. We have the finest workforce in the Federal Government, and together we can make a profound difference in the lives of our Nation's veterans and their families by achieving the goals and objectives presented in this plan. I strongly encourage each and every employee to review this document and discuss it with your supervisor and peers. It is extremely important that each of us fully understands which goals and objectives our work directly supports and how our efforts affect the lives of veterans. You are encouraged to use this document to learn more about the full array of programs and functions that are carried out throughout VA.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Anthony J. Principi".

Anthony J. Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs